

VZCZCXRO2965
RR RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC
DE RUEHUM #0245/01 2400050
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 280050Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2997
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2594
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3770
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3423
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 ULAANBAATAR 000245

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/CM, EAP/PA, EAP/PD, C
HQ PACOM FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR (J007)

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PROP](#) [KPAL](#) [PGOV](#) [OPRC](#) [MN](#)

SUBJECT: MONGOLIA'S TOP MEDIA OUTLETS AND THEIR AFFILIATIONS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Eighteen years after independence, Mongolia's major media outlets remain influenced by political parties and powerful patrons. If not exactly a free press, a vibrant media scene has nonetheless emerged from amid the tangled web of interlocking ownership relations. Among print media, the sheer number of papers ensures some degree of balance for educated readers in the diversity of voices. Television remains the major medium for reaching the masses, from the capital through the provinces, and also offers a balance of voices across the political spectrum. The Internet is also beginning to make headway, especially among Mongolian youth. With penetration rates growing and access to Internet cafes plentiful in the capital and growing in the provinces, two leading news websites have emerged that bear watching. Following is a rundown of the top Mongolian media outlets with commentary on their ownership, influences and political affiliations - all of which are well known as fact or rumor throughout Mongolian society. END SUMMARY.

Leading Newspapers - How the Elite Get Their News

¶2. (SBU) Mongolia's educated, mostly urban population, while also television watchers, read the non-tabloid newspapers during the week when most papers are available for (relatively expensive) subscription. Mongolian readers describe needing to read at least two to three papers to get a balanced version of the news. Following is a list by estimated circulation of the twelve leading Ulaanbaatar municipal and national daily newspapers (out of an estimated 131 papers), with commentary on their political affiliation and ownership. Estimated circulation is as reported in the annual "Mongolian Media Today 2009" survey published by The Press Institute, an independent media NGO that conducts research and trains journalists.

Odriin Sonin/Daily News
Founded in 1999.
Estimated circulation: 10,093
Claimed circulation: 15,000
Party affiliation: Democratic Party (DP).
Comment: "Daily News" is a well-respected and openly DP-supportive paper. It is partially owned by current President Ts. Elbegdorj and reports positively on DP activities, reaching readers in Ulaanbaatar and throughout the aimags (provinces).

Ogloonii Sonin/Morning News
Founded in 2006.
Estimated circulation: 7,973
Claimed circulation: 6,000 - 8,000
Party affiliation: Mongolia People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP).
Comment: "Morning News" is a new Ulaanbaatar metro paper that is not well-regarded for its content. However it is owned by the UB Print

Company which owns two of the city's most popular weeklies and is headed by the Deputy Governor of Ulaanbaatar's most populated district, Songino Khaikhan. The paper is aligned with former President Enkhbayar and the MPRP.

Unooder/Today

Founded in 1996.

Estimated circulation: 7,687

Claimed circulation: 10,000 - 11,000

Party affiliation: MPRP/neutral

Comment: "Today" is considered the most neutral and one of the best run of the national dailies operating in Mongolia. Established immediately after the Free Press Law was passed in 1996, it was jointly owned by Ts. Baldorj, the well-respected journalist and writer who died two years ago, as well as former President and MPRP member N. Bagabandi and Su. Baldold, the now deceased General Director of the Erdenet Copper Mine. Despite a natural MPRP slant due to ownership, the paper has managed to stay neutral, publishing balanced commentary and criticisms of MPRP Presidential candidates. The family business that Baldorj passed on when he died also owns the upscale Ulaanbaatar Hotel in the capital and UB-2 Hotel in Terelj National Park, in addition to its other news holdings: the English weekly "The UB Post," two other Mongolian weeklies and Channel 25. "Today" has Mongolia's only female Editor-in-Chief, Ts. Nandintushig. She is Baldorj's daughter and is in her early 30s.

Zuuny Medee/Centennial News

Founded in 1999

Estimated circulation: 7,230

Claimed circulation: 13,000

Party affiliation: MPRP/Government

Comment: Formerly a government run newspaper, "Centennial News"

ULAANBAATA 00000245 002 OF 004

became a purely personal political organ when the Editor-in-Chief and part-owner B. Ganbold broke with his two powerful partners, former President Enkhbayar and current Foreign Minister S. Batbold, leaving to form "The National Post." The paper is now owned by Enkhbayar and his family. (NOTE: Enkhbayar's wife is the head of Free Press, an NGO which was created in 2000 to take journalists and owners on expensive overseas trips, which was rumored to influence coverage of Enkhbayar in the run-up to his election in 2000. END NOTE.)

Unen/Truth

Founded in 1920

Estimated circulation: 6,364

Claimed circulation: 4,000 - 5,000

Party affiliation: MPRP

Comment: Mongolia's first and oldest paper, the former Communist Party organ. Before Mongolian independence, subscription for party members was mandatory. Now subscription supposedly serves as a mark of dedication to the MPRP. It runs mostly MPRP news and perspectives and no longer has the status or influence it once had. The current Editor-in-Chief is a mid-level MPRP member.

Undesnii Shuudan/The National Post

Founded in 2007

Estimated circulation: 4,567

Claimed circulation: 9,000 - 10,000

Party affiliation: DP/neutral

Comment: "The National Post" is among Ulaanbaatar's most respected and more balanced papers. Editor-in-Chief B. Gambolt broke with his two powerful partners at "Centennial News," former President Enkhbayar and current Foreign Minister S. Batbold, to form his own paper. "The National Post" does not follow either main party's line. Gambolt took some of Mongolia's best journalists with him when he left, paying them decent salaries.

Niigmiin Toli/Social Mirror

Founded in 2006

Estimated circulation: 3,290

Claimed circulation: 3,500 - 4,000

Party affiliation: DP

Comment: Relatively new and not very popular, "Social Mirror" is only distributed in Ulaanbaatar.

Ardchilal/Democracy

Founded in 1990

Estimated circulation: 2,305

Claimed circulation: 3,000 - 4,000

Party affiliation: DP

Comment: One of two papers along with "News of Mongolia" owned by the influential DP Member of Parliament and Minister of Roads, Construction and Infrastructure, Mr. Kh. Battulga. Through his Genco holding company, Kh. Battulga owns mining operations, the upscale Bayangol Hotel in Ulaanbaatar, tourism companies and tourism sites (including the 131-foot Genghis Khan statue an hour outside of Ulaanbaatar) and TV channel C1.

Onoodriin Mongol/Mongolia Today

Founded in 2005

Estimated circulation: 1,832

Claimed circulation: 4,000 - 5,000

Party affiliation: Newspaper of the small opposition parties.

Comment: Not well known.

Ardyn Erkh/People's Right

Founded in 2005

Estimated circulation: 1,732

Claimed circulation: 3,000

Party affiliation: DP/Citizen's Will Party

Comment: Owned by Minister of Defense and DP Member of Parliament Lu. Bold. "People's Right," despite its low circulation, is read by officials and elite interested in knowing the inside baseball of government news. Lu. Bold's Bodi International company also owns www.news.mn, Mongolia's most frequently trafficked Internet news site (see below), which lends reporting from "People's Right" added importance.

Mongoliin Medee/News of Mongolia

Founded in 1998

Estimated circulation: 1,172

Claimed circulation: 2,000 - 3,000

Party affiliation: DP

Comment: Although low circulation, "News of Mongolia" is read mostly by younger elite who admire its more objective reporting. Its owner, Erdenebat, who also owns the large Erel Cement and

ULAANBAATA 00000245 003 OF 004

Construction Company, was a Member of Parliament at the time of the paper's founding. He lost his seat in 2004 and, after losing further influence, sold the paper in 2008. Despite its name, "News of Mongolia" is only published and distributed in Ulaanbaatar.

Niislel Times/Capital Times

Founded in 2008.

Estimated circulation: 587

Claimed circulation: 3,000 - 6,000

Party affiliation: MPRP

Comment: Due to its recent establishment, this paper is not well known. It reports only on city administration and Ulaanbaatar news and is not distributed outside of the capital.

Leading National Television Broadcasters

13. (SBU) Television is the main source of information for the majority of the population. Television licenses are difficult and expensive to obtain, leading to a good deal of corruption, bureaucracy and rumors surrounding ownership in the major channels. Mongolian elites thus take a skeptical view of the news they receive via television, although it does not stop them from watching. No research on viewer numbers appears available, despite the 91 listed television stations that the Press Institute reported in existence in 2008.

14. (SBU) "MNB" (Mongolian National Broadcaster) was established in 1967 as the state-owned television station. The law on public broadcast was passed in 2005 and MNB was rebranded as Mongolia's public television station. The 15-member National Council

consisting of representatives from the President and Prime Minister's offices, Parliament, NGOs and representatives from the Mongolian Journalists' Association supposedly direct its content. The station broadcasts political, social and financial news as well as entertainment and children's programming nationwide. MNB has a high viewership and is especially popular in the countryside outside of Ulaanbaatar, serving as the main source of information for a great deal of the population. However, the station's reputation suffered a major blow in 2008 during the four-day state of emergency. Viewers who tuned in for objective coverage instead received broadcasts directed by the security services.

14. (SBU) "TV9" belongs to Media Holding Co Ltd. Responding to popular demand, during his time as Minister of Culture, in 2003 former President N. Enkhbayar accepted TV equipment from a Japanese Buddhist organization on behalf of Hamba Lama Choijamts of the Gandan Monastery to establish a Buddhist television station to counter the rising influence of Christian-oriented Eagle TV (see below). Enkhbayar, well-known as a Buddhist supporter, seems to have appropriated the equipment and started his own Buddhist and MPRP-supporting station. The Board of Directors includes Foreign Minister Su. Batbold and Member of Parliament Ts. Munkh-Orgil. The station is generally known as "Enkhbayar's TV station."

15. (SBU) Nationwide broadcaster, "TV5," belongs to Gegeen Dalai Co. Ltd. Allegedly, 50 percent is also controlled by a separate block of powerful shareholders, including Kh. Badamsuren, former director of Mongolroostsvetmet, and former Minister of Infrastructure U. Ulambayar. It has been vigorously supportive of the MPRP, especially during the last election.

16. (SBU) "UBS TV" is also broadcast nationwide. Before privatization, it belonged to the Ulaanbaatar City Council. In 2004, UBD TV signed a three-year management contract with the city government. In 2007, Ts. Balkhjav bought UBS TV from the Ulaanbaatar government. Balkhjav is a wealthy businessman, MPRP member and well-known television personality and music composer. The station is pro-MPRP.

17. (SBU) The first private TV station in Mongolia, "Channel 25" was established by several well-known Mongolian journalists and is broadcast nationwide. Independent Member of Parliament Z. Altai was the director of Channel 25 until his election to Parliament in June 2008, making him Parliament's only independent member. The station is widely watched, well-liked and well-respected for its independent editorial content. Despite investment from the MPRP-leaning owners of "Today" newspaper, Channel 25 slants either neutral or slightly DP in its reporting.

18. (SBU) The Discovery Channel of Mongolia, "Bolovsrol Suvag" (Education TV) is a private broadcaster, sponsored by the Bodi Group, whose popularity has grown since it went national in 2008.

ULAANBAATA 00000245 004 OF 004

But as Education TV does not yet have its full broadcasting license, its content remains controlled by the government. As a result, it does not broadcast any news or political programming and sticks to educational content. Its lack of a political agenda and its documentaries on science, technology, the environment and learning foreign languages give it a broad-base appeal, especially in rural areas. The Bodi Group also owns "People's Right" newspaper and leading news website, www.news.mn. Its Board of Directors includes Member of Parliament and Minister of Defense Lu. Bold and former Citizen's Will Party member of Parliament M. Zorigt. The Korean-based Lotte Group provided initial financial support to the Bodi Group.

19. (SBU) "Eagle TV" was established in 1994 by South Dakota-based Christian organization Among, which is linked to the Church of Latter Day Saints. It only broadcasts in Ulaanbaatar and surrounding areas but is generally regarded as having set the standard for best practices in Mongolian broadcast journalism, influencing news reporting on other channels. Its news director is an American but all journalists and on-air reporters are Mongolians. The station is well-known for its Christian-themed programs, but its slogan of "fast, clean, free" news has become the standard other

news programs are judged by. Eagle TV is seen as "American news" and there is a misconception among the general public that the station is somehow sponsored by or linked to the U.S. Embassy.

Mongolia's Two Top News Websites

¶10. (SBU) Online news is still in its infancy in Mongolia although Internet access is relatively available, especially through Internet cafes throughout Ulaanbaatar and in every town in the provinces. However, two sites have thus far emerged as the leading sources for Mongolia's young and well-educated readers to get their news.

¶11. (SBU) www.news.mn belongs to the "People's Right" newspaper and is the most visited Mongolian website for news with 40,000 visitors per day. According to news.mn's Editor, D. Narantuya, following the July 1, 2008 shutdown of all television due to the state of emergency following electoral violence, the number of visitors reached 60,000 - 70,000 establishing it as a credible alternative source for news. The site also translates and publishes some of its stories in English, although there is a two to three day time lag.

¶12. (U) www.olloo.mn is owned by Olloo Co. Ltd, established in spring 2004. According to the company, the website has 70,000 - 80,000 visitors a day. They are planning to establish a TV studio and already have news and other broadcast programs streaming on their website.

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: Journalism in Mongolia still has a long way to go to provide the public with objective and impartial news free from pressure and the influence of political parties, special interest groups, and influential individuals. Reporting on political and other sensitive developments in a timely manner also needs improvement. This point was driven home by recent comments from an influential Mongolian Member of Parliament. He suggested increasing the number of Mongolian journalists sent to the United States on exchange programs so they could better understand the role journalism plays in U.S. political dialogue and the ethical standards to which U.S. journalists are held. END COMMENT.

MINTON